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# Greggs, its vegan sausage roll and the art of effective PR

Add Piers Morgan and it becomes quite a mix



Greggs new vegan sausage roll (Image: Josh Knapman)

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Greggs and the art of effective PR

Earlier this week, viewers of ITV's Good Morning Britain were treated to the deeply unedifying sight of resident controversialist presenter [Piers Morgan](#) chewing Greggs the baker's new vegan sausage roll before emptying the unswallowed specimen into a conveniently placed bin.

What occurred was simply the latest development in what has been Morgan's campaign against Greggs' decision to launch vegan products.

On January 2, in response to a Greggs tweet introducing the pastry, Morgan himself [tweeted](#): "Nobody was waiting for a vegan bloody sausage, you PC-ravaged clowns."

Aside from the cartoonish insult, in point of fact Morgan was wrong about nobody waiting for vegan products – Greggs' decision to create the meat free sausage roll was taken partly as a result of a petition by the organisation People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

As [its website announced](#): "The people have spoken: last year, more than 20,000 of them signed PETA's petition asking for a vegan sausage roll – and Greggs listened. The most hotly anticipated launch of 2019 will mean that the skyrocketing number of vegans, vegetarians, and flexitarians around the UK will never be far from a quick and delicious plant-based snack."

For me though, and I'm well aware that by writing this piece I'm adding to the publicity that both Greggs and Morgan thrive upon, the most remarkable aspect of this whole affair has been the successful implementation of Greggs public relations strategy.

The company is well used to using controversy to positively promote its products.

In November 2017 it launched a limited edition advent calendar containing a token for a separate menu item behind each window. This soon attracted the [attention of the clergy](#), who reacted predictably negatively to a nativity scene which saw the baby Jesus replaced by a partially chewed sausage roll.

National newspaper coverage and social media activity went into overdrive but in terms of the one thing that really matters - sales - Greggs emerged not only undamaged by the furore but actually strengthened. [According to PR Week magazine](#), in the weeks after the hullabaloo Greggs across the country were selling out of sausage rolls.

[As Mark Beaumont](#), executive creative director of Manchester-based agency, Dinosaur, put it - with only 1.5% of the country regularly attending church, what sales Greggs lost were dwarfed by the huge sales gains that followed the widespread national coverage.

With the launch of the vegan sausage roll, the involvement of Morgan appears to have generated interest and boosted sales.

When Morgan tweeted his original outrage, Greggs responded with the playful, “Oh, hello Piers, we’ve been expecting you” which suggested to some observers that all this was a manufactured outrage conducted with the prior collusion of both parties. A suspicion that was given credence by the fact that both Morgan and Greggs have in the recent past worked with the same PR Company, Taylor Herring.

This, however, appears to be far from the truth.

Neil Knowles, digital brand manager at Greggs, told [John McCarthy](#) at Drum magazine the campaign for the vegan sausage roll was developed by the baker’s in-house marketing team and agency partners, Havas PR and Splendid Communications.

The idea was to introduce the product as “premium and desirable” and to coincide with “Veganuary” as consumers considered “new dieting and eating resolutions”.

The fact that Morgan decided to voice his opposition is simply Greggs good fortune because the former editor of the Daily Mirror, if he does nothing else, guarantees publicity to whichever issue he makes his concern.

[According to the Financial Times](#), the spats with Morgan and the reactions to [an introductory video](#) which parodies iPhone commercials (five million views and rising) vastly outstripped anything a marketing budget could buy.

Greggs’ PR also targeted those that matter in the publicity game - [media workers](#).

As Knowles told McCarthy: “The new Greggs Vegan Sausage Roll was delivered to media to allow them to taste the quality of the product, even if they’d never tried vegan food before. The feedback has spoken for itself.”

In effect what Greggs did was simple enough: respond to a growing customer demand for a product it was quite capable of producing reasonably easily. The hardest part was ensuring there was enough publicity around the products’ launch.

The only problem at the moment for Greggs is getting supply to meet demand. As I write, [the Daily Mail is reporting](#) that “two day-old Greggs vegan sausage rolls ‘still in original packet’ are being sold on eBay for £12.50” and [individual consumers are reporting empty trays](#) at numerous bakeries.

Greggs is now established as [Britain’s biggest bakery chain](#) and part of the reason for their success is in the way it has adapted to diversifying customer demands.

Also integral is the way in which it communicates with consumers. The fact is, the “sausage” roll is [not even the first vegan product](#) the company has produced. It was just marketed that way.

**\* Dr Jewell is director of undergraduate studies at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Culture.**